

CAPTAIN FREDERICK STEELE.

[To accompany bill H. R. No. 647.]

DECEMBER 26, 1856.

Mr. B. CLARKE, from the Committee on Military Affairs, made the following

REPORT.

The Committee on Military Affairs, to whom was referred the memorial of Brevet Captain Frederick Steele, United States army, respectfully report:

The evidence proves that the memorialist, in the month of May, 1849, whilst at San Francisco, California, was appointed by his commanding officer, Major A. C. Miller, of the second infantry, acting assistant quartermaster and commissary to a detachment of infantry then under orders for the mining districts east of the San Joaquin river. By this appointment he was required to take charge of funds necessary for the command to the amount of nine thousand dollars, all in silver. He applied for a safe in which to keep the money securely, but only one could be obtained, which was small in size, and would only hold about six thousand dollars of the money. The remaining \$3,000 he had to receive in a wooden box, well secured with screws. With the money thus put up, it was transported by steamer to Stockton, thence in a wagon to a camp thirty miles distant. At this camp the wooden box was put away in the tent of Lieut. Morse, contiguous to that of the commanding officer, and within the sight of three separate sentinels. Capt. Steele had often to visit Stockton, the stores of the command being kept there on board of a chartered brig; and being, in addition to his duties as quartermaster and commissary, in command of one of the companies of the detachment, was necessitated also often to be absent in pursuit of deserters, he being the only officer of his company with it. On the fourth of July, 1849, he was ordered to Stockton on official business, whither he proceeded, and having closed it immediately, returned that night to the encampment. Immediately after his return, he was struck by the appearance of the wooden box, which had contained the three thousand dollars, and upon examining it, discovered that it had been broken open, and the money stolen. An investigation was instantly instituted, and five hundred dollars reward offered for a clue to the robbery, but all without avail; the thief or thieves was never discovered, or the money recovered.

The three thousand dollars so lost stands charged against Captain Steele on the books of the government, and it is to have the same

allowed him in the settlement of his accounts that he now memorializes Congress.

The committee, looking at the condition of California in 1849, are struck with the exercise of the vigilance which marked Captain Steele's care of the amount of money placed in his hands. In a new country, where the means for the safe keeping of money were limited, he had imposed upon him the custody of nine thousand dollars in the most bulky form, that of silver; the necessities of the service, and, indeed, the absence of any other coin in the country, forced the officer to take it in that heavy, bulky and inconvenient shape. He procures the best safe he could, and placing in it all that it would hold, he secures the balance in a box which he stows away in an officer's tent, within the sight of three sentries. If Captain Steele's duties confined him to the one place in the vicinity of this money, he might be somewhat culpable for its loss; but when the fact is observed that his legitimate duties as an officer in command of a company had to be discharged by him, and that a branch of the very extra duty which involved his custody of this stolen money required him to be often absent at Stockton, where the quartermaster's and commissary's stores were kept on a chartered brig, and which was a distance of thirty miles from the camp, Captain Steele must have been omnipresent, to have been in direct observation of this box of money at all times. He certainly could not have carried it about him wherever he went; and the committee think it was kept by him in as safe a place as the genius of any one could devise, looking at the country where he was, and the fact that he was in an encampment thirty miles from town.

The committee, believing that the loss of the money was not owing to the want of any due diligence on the part of Captain Steele, report the accompanying bill for his relief.